



News

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CERTAIN FACTORS PUT WOMEN AT HIGHER RISK OF DEATH FROM HEART DISEASE

A new study shows that women who have early heart disease are more likely to die sooner if they have diabetes or have a low level of high density lipoprotein (HDL), which is a component of cholesterol. Results of the study were presented by University of Maryland Medical Center cardiologist Michael Miller, M.D. at the American Heart Association's 65th Scientific Sessions on November 18. Dr. Miller is assistant professor of medicine and director of the Center for Preventive Cardiology at the University of Maryland Medical Center. He is the lead author of the study.

The study followed 140 women for up to 15 years. Each was suspected of having some level of heart disease. Of those women who died, researchers looked at what risk factors may have contributed to their deaths, including obesity, the presence of high blood pressure, history of smoking, lack of exercise, high total cholesterol levels, low levels of HDL, diabetes and triglycerides.

The study found that the most important predictor of death from cardiovascular disease in women was diabetes. Women in the

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study who had heart disease and diabetes were more than four times as likely to die over the 15 year period of heart disease than women without diabetes. Diabetes is known to accelerate the process of hardening of the arteries.

The second most important predictor was a low level of the so called "good cholesterol" (HDL). Women in the study who had an HDL level below 45 were nearly three times as likely to die from cardiovascular disease than if their HDL level was above 45.

"It's always been felt that a low HDL in men is predictive of heart disease, but this study points out the value and the importance of a low HDL in women. It, too, is an important predictor of death from cardiovascular disease in women," says Dr. Miller.

The study also found that non-diabetic women who had a triglyceride level greater than 150 were two-and-one-half times more likely to die from cardiovascular disease. This is the first study to demonstrate the importance of triglycerides alone as a predictor of cardiovascular death in women, independent of the total cholesterol level. Dr. Miller suggests that all women at risk for heart disease have their triglycerides and HDL measured in addition to total cholesterol.

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